

## UNIVERSITY-CIVIL SOCIETY COLLABORATION FOR IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE BRAZILIAN NORTHEAST

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present the activities of the research and community engagement project "Civil Society Participation in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals" which has been developed by the Department of International Relations at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) since January of 2015. The project has two main lines of action: 1. The dissemination of the UN development agenda, through courses and training offered to organized civil society groups, public managers, educational institutions and other interested political and civil associations. 2. Mapping all the research projects and engagement activities promoted by UFPB and categorizing them according to the UN Sustainable Development Goals with the purpose of collaborating with the implementation process of the goals in the region.

During the last months, in partnership with the UNDP local representation, the Department of International Relations collaborated with more than 10 training courses for political actors on UN Development Goals in four states in the Brazilian northeast, with important results. In addition, the project developed a comprehensive evaluation of the research activities and other community engagement projects being developed in UFPB that can contribute to local development, categorizing these actions taking as reference SDGs. The idea is to encourage the dissemination of these projects in a way they can contribute to local administrations and create synergies with social and productive actors in the region.

The Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) is one of the largest public universities in Brazil, with a huge budget and a significant number of research and engagement projects running nowadays. The university is located in one of the poorest states of the federation, Paraíba (23<sup>rd</sup> place among 26 states in terms of HDI), in the Brazilian Northeast, the region which, as a whole, has the lowest levels of human development in the country. Therefore, the university can contribute actively and deeply in the process of regional development, creation of creative and intelligent solutions to local problems and, at the end, meeting SDGs Objectives.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the latter approved in the 70th General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), constituted the largest global initiative organized by the international community aimed at reducing poverty, inequality and improving economic and social conditions of people in line with to the promotion of human rights. Organized around macro goals, specific targets and indicators for implementation monitoring, the *United Nations Development Goals* covered many areas and issues of relevance to the support of social transformation strategies. The transition between the ODM and ODS agendas led to a significant increase in the number of goals, from the 8 commitments in 2000 to 17 the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>1</sup>

In general, the MDGs and their implementation process, despite the problems in their design and weaknesses in their execution process, reported in comprehensive analyses, significantly contributed to organize an important set of global actions focusing on human development. In addition, they encouraged the formation of a globally accepted understanding of the centrality of initiatives aimed at reaching their targets (FEHLING, NELSON; VENKATAPURAM, 2013). The process of negotiation and adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>2</sup> consecrated and deepened this global view of the need to advance in the process of combating poverty; expanding the vision of development (sustainable); and strengthening the actions of international organizations, national governments, civil society and private sector for this purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> 1. No Poverty - End poverty in all its forms everywhere; 2. Zero Hunger - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; 3. Good Health and Well-being - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; 4. Quality Education - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; 5. Gender Equality - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; 6. Clean Water and Sanitation - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; 7. Affordable and Clean Energy - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and clean energy for all; 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure - Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; 10. Reduced Inequalities - Reduce inequality within and among countries; 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; 12. Responsible Consumption and Production - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; 13. Climate Action - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; 14. Life Below Water - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; 15. Life on Land - Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; 17. Partnerships for the Goals - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

<sup>2</sup> The process started with UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20), resulting in the document "The Future we Want". After the process was conducted within the Open Working Group, High Level Panel, Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing and UN Task Team. At the end the UN General Assembly published the document "Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

It became clear in the analysis of the MDGs' process of adoption and implementation and, especially in the negotiations for the construction of post-2015 agenda, that the success of a global development agenda **requires ample participation of the peoples** and must not be constituted just as a public speech and a set of initiatives taken by governments spasmodically or with electoral goals. The process of *building* a comprehensive agenda intended for transforming **must include civil society actively**, just as the *control and supervision* of government actions and the *achievement* of targets by individuals is essential.

The importance of **increased social participation** in the formulation of initiatives aimed at achieving the targets that constitute the ODS and supervising public actions is explained by the need to *adapt the global discourse and major goals and targets into initiatives and policies that meet local needs and particularities and directly deal with the specific demands of countries and populations*. The uniformity of the global discourse should not be understood as the homogenization of ways to achieve the goals or as models and *one-size-fits-all* type of policies, but rather, should be translated to local problems.

In this context, the University can play a significant role and present itself as a major player in promoting development, as well as contributing to the implementation of SDGs. The actions and activities within this environment, involving teaching, research and community engagement projects, carry great transformative potential. Thus, recognizing i) the importance of academic and intellectual discussions about development and underdevelopment in Brazil; ii) the fruitful role that universities can play in the production and diffusion of qualified scientific knowledge to society and iii) the need for greater social participation in the dissemination and implementation of SDGs agenda, the actions being developed at UFPB, reported in this article, are structured. Thus, the community engagement project *Civil Society Participation in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*<sup>3</sup>, being developed since early 2015 as a result of the maturation of academic research activities, has the general purpose of encouraging the participation of the University with public actors as a way to contribute to the socio-economic development. To that end, it has two main goals.

1. The first is to act directly on the dissemination of the United Nations development agenda, by conducting activities and capacitation courses for organizations and social movements, especially of young people, public administrators and business organizations linked to the SDGs implementation process.
2. The second objective, still in the structuring and developing phase, is the mapping of scientific and technological research activities at UFPB which can contribute technically to the implementation of the SDGs locally or nationally.

## **2. THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION AND THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE SGDS IMPLEMENTATION IN BRAZIL**

Civil society, despite its strong participation in the negotiation process of the UN conferences in the 1990s – promoting proposals relative to development and human rights – had no direct

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<sup>3</sup> (The project is financially supported by the Ministry of Education (PROEXT Program) and is being developed in partnership with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

space in the formulation of MDGs. The Millennium agenda was formulated by experts from developed countries and international organizations, under the direction of the UN Secretariat. Indeed, open preparatory committees, in which civil society had direct participation, were not organized (BISSIO, 2003). Despite the lack of inclusion of civil society in MDGs planning process, taking into account the importance of their collective ownership and civil mobilization for their adequate development, the Millennium Declaration urged governments to advance partnerships with civil society in their process of development and achievement of the MDGs.

To advance the promotion of development, the evaluation of the results achieved by the MDGs agenda and the post-2015 development agenda negotiation noted the importance of increased and more effective participation of civil society, both in the **goal-setting process** and their implementation. Thus, unlike what was verified in the formulation of the MDGs, the construction of the new agenda took as a core responsibility the commitment to expand the participation and strengthen the democratic participation process (VANDERMOORTELE, 2012). Similarly, it seeks to establish more effective mechanisms for more fruitful civil society action in the incorporation of the development agenda in local political preferences and the very promotion of local development.

Considering the importance of civil society in the implementation of the SDGs, the community engagement project aims, on the one hand, to bring knowledge on development, and the UN agenda to civil organizations, public officials and the private sector. On the other hand, it purposes to encourage the dissemination and use of scientific and technological knowledge produced for a whole range of uses that bring positive results in terms of public management, technological development and help implementing SDGs.

The **importance of education** in economic and social development paths of countries must be emphasized. Several studies point to the direct relationship between the improvement of economic and social indicators of nations and growing access to basic education, incentives to higher education and increases in investments on scientific and technological research. Despite this clear finding, there are still huge gaps and spaces to deepen discussions on the role of education and especially the Universities in the production and dissemination of i) useful knowledge to scientifically support and promote public policies and development strategies, ii) social technologies to contribute more actively in shaping stakeholder initiatives in society; iii) capacitation and human resources.

The University, especially public universities in Brazil, has a fundamental and strategic role in these three dimensions. Firstly, capacitating citizens and human resources qualified and with vocation to act directly in the solution of technical and social problems consistent with national demands and specificities. Secondly, with the production of useful and high quality academic-scientific knowledge, able to sustain and direct the solution of these problems and produce innovations and revolutions that create new instruments to advance in overcoming structural problems. Finally, the University also has a function that combines all of these elements in an active and transformative manner – the achievement of **community engagement projects** for directly externalizing technical and analytical capacity produced at the University in a manner integrated with society.

### 3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT “CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS”

The project was structured aiming at acting with organized civil society in the states of northeastern Brazil through a double agenda. On the one hand, through the simultaneous **capacitation of political and social actors** to stimulate their qualified and effective participation in current discussions on public policies for SDGs implementation, such as **identifying specific demands** related to issues that cut across the UN development agenda. This part of the project's activities plays an important role in the implementation of the development goals , since it contributed to i) **ownership** of the goals in the localities; ii) monitoring and supervising public actions.

On the other hand, mapping the intellectual, scientific and technological production at UFPB that may have a material use in the process of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

The work with social groups and actors tends to allow the construction of technical and organizational capacities for them to follow and contribute more skillfully to the political discussions on socio-economic development. The capacitations were structured based on studies on the MDGs and SDGs, their objectives and targets, the fulfillment of these and the identification of priority themes and issues. Departing from that, we have sought to qualify youths and other civil society actors, preparing them to monitor the implementation of public policies aimed at achieving the development goals.

#### 3.1. Activities developed

Since the beginning of the mentioned community engagement project, various activities were carried out with the general purpose of **dissemination of the UN development agenda, training social groups, capacitating multipliers** and developing **activities with the private sector**.

The training offered by the project is directed towards: i) groups of young people in vulnerable situations and other groups interested in the subject; ii) multipliers – members of civil society organizations; iii) public officials of municipalities in the northeastern states .

YOUTH CAPACITATION - MARIA MADALENA OLIVEIRA CAVALCANTE INSTITUTE (IMMOC).	
Venue	Recife/PE
Date	June 12, 2015. August 14, 2015. June 17, 2016
Target	Around 60 young people, aged between 16 and 21 years, from the

Audience	communities of the cities of Olinda and Recife/PE.
Proponent(s)	IMMOC/United Nations Development Program (UNDP)/Nós Podemos Pernambuco.
<b>YOUTH AND STUDENTS' CAPACITATION AT ASCES COLLEGE</b>	
Venue	ASCES College Campus I.
Date	October 23, 2015.
Target Audience	50 participants of the Seminar "Post-2015 Challenges and Perspectives" (mainly International Relations students)
Proponent(s)	Caruaruense Association of Higher and Technical Education (ASCES College) / United Nations Development Program (UNDP).
<b>MULTIPLIERS CAPACITATION AT FORTALEZA/CE</b>	
Venue	Fortaleza/CE: Ceará Mayors' Association (APRECE).
Date	August 07, 2015.
Target Audience	Around 50 people (representatives from municipalities in Ceará; state/municipal associations and agencies)
Proponent(s)	Nós Podemos Ceará / Movimento Nacional pela Cidadania e Solidariedade / United Nations Development Program (UNDP).
<b>MULTIPLIERS CAPACITATION AT SÃO BENTO DO UNA/PE</b>	
Venue	São Bento do Una/PE: Town Hall.
Date	September 22, 2015.
Target Audience	Around 50 people (students, teachers and managers of the Municipal Secretary of Education at São Bento do Una)
Proponent(s)	Nós Podemos Pernambuco/ United Nations Development Program (UNDP).
<b>CAPACITATION FOR EDUCATION SECRETARY AT SÃO BENTO DO UNA/P</b>	
Venue	São Bento do Una/PE.
Date	April 24, 2016
Target Audience	Around 600 teachers and public managers from the Municipal Secretary of Education - São Bento do Una/PE.
Proponent(s)	Municipal Secretary of Education, São Bento do Uma / Núcleo ODS de São Bento do Uma / United Nations Development Program (UNDP).
<b>MULTIPLIERS CAPACITATION AT RECIFE/PE</b>	
Venue	Municipalist Association of Pernambuco (AMUPE)
Date	October 29, 2015.
Target Audience	Around 30 people, from members of municipal departments, educational institutions and social movements.
Proponent(s)	Nós Podemos Pernambuco / Movimento Nacional pela Cidadania e Solidariedade / United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

<b>MULTIPLIERS CAPACITATION AT NATAL/RN</b>	
Venue	Natal/RN: Sebrae.
Date	December 02, 2015.
Target Audience	Around 20 pessoas, among which post-graduation students; representatives from municipal and state agencies; associations and institutions connected to "Nós Podemos".
Proponent(s)	Nós Podemos Rio Grande do Norte / Movimento Nacional pela Cidadania e Solidariedade / United Nations Development Program (UNDP).
<b>MULTIPLIERS AND YOUTH CAPACITATION</b>	
Venue	Centro Estadual de Ensino-Aprendizagem Sesquicentenário, João Pessoa/PB.
Date	
Target Audience	Around 30 young students
Proponent(s)	Rotary Youth Leader Anwar (RYLA) / United Nations Development Program (UNDP).
<b>PARAIBA STATE SECRETARIAT OF PLANNING AND BUDGET MEETING</b>	
Venue	State Secretariat of Planning and Budget, João Pessoa/PB
Date	June 20, 2016
Target Audience	Public managers from State Government
Proponent(s)	Paraíba State Secretariat of Planning and Budget / United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

### 3.2. Some of the results presented

Over the short period of the project's development, it has already been possible to identify some practical results of the actions taken. We bring, below, three examples through testimonials of groups and individuals targeted by the project, illustrating three dimensions of actions and results : i) the **capacitating young people**; ii) **capacity building in the public sector** (elementary school teachers of the Secretariat Education of São Bento do Una) ; iii) **capacitating civil society groups** (training multipliers).

The three training sessions held at IMMOC aimed at presenting the agenda to youths from the IMMOC Program to develop projects under supervision over a year, for them to take ownership of the agenda in their daily actions and policies. Attached follows brief testimony of youth who is engaged in the actions developed by the project.

**Training of elementary school teachers** and officials of the Secretary of Education of São Bento do Una/PE. The Municipal Secretary of Education of São Bento has been operating

since 2014 focusing on the United Nations Development agendas. Until December 2015 the activities revolved around the Millennium Development Goals and, since 2016, Project **#MAIS – Morality + Action + Social Integrity** initiated its work based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Through these actions emerged opportunities to develop a sense of responsibility throughout the school community, something which is only possible when people have access to knowledge and this is acquired in a sensitive way. Therefore it is up to the teacher, which is the main transformer agent, and all who are part of the school to adopt attitudes that aim at the common good in all actions developed.

To take the knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda, a SDGs workshop was held for 600 teachers from the municipal network of 63 schools teaching, being 3 of early childhood education, involving 10,129 students, to prepare projects to be developed in schools throughout the year 2016. The testimony of Ms. Miriam Costa, Secretary of Municipal Education, attached, clarifies the effects of the training.

UNDP also performed, with the support of the community engagement project, a training for multipliers of the transition from MDGs to SDGs in the state of Ceará, to ensure the best conditions for the volunteers to work and that they are able to achieve the expected results in favor the Millennium Development Goals and the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals. In a specific workshop, 33 volunteers from various regions of the state attended. These multipliers from Ceará make up a network of 280 volunteers trained by UNDP Brazil who work in their specific states. The testimony of one of them can be seen attached.

#### **4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In general, what we sought to explain in this article was the importance of the University in the countries development trajectories and, especially, in the UN Development Agenda implementation process. Distinctively, we tried to present a specific experience under development at the Federal University of Paraíba, very successful so far.

The development of the community engagement project highlighted in this text has as reference to the recognition of civil society as a key political actors and its specific role in the formulation and implementation of development projects suited to their specific needs and demands. That is, it appreciates the greater efficiency and appropriateness of interventions and public projects, as well as its sustainability throughout time, when linked to actual conditions experienced by affected populations. It is in this sense that the University can play an appropriate role, capacitating and multiplying knowledge and experiences.

The presented community engagement project has been based on the production of specific knowledge on development projects related to the MDGs. In general, it seeks to promote the development of innovative studies for International Relations, understood as a specific area of expertise, as well as the economic and social development of the country and spread them through the promoted trainings.

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## **ANNEX I:**

Testimony of Leonardo Alves Dias de Oliveira – concluding student in 2015

### **Importance of the MDGs and SDGs training conducted by the UFPB students:**

I was a student of the 2015 class at IMMOC (Maria Madalena Oliveira Cavalcante Institute) and participated in the MDGs and SDGs workshop conducted by the students from UFPB (Federal University of Paraíba).

Our study aimed to SDGs 1 and 2 (Eradication of poverty and Zero Hunger), respectively. My group applied the work of SDGs in the communities of Chié in Recife-PE and High Rising Sun, in Olinda-PE. We delivered basic-needs grocery packages to some families who are in poverty situation and realized that the promotion of this project was not only a volunteer job, it was also an act of love towards our neighbors.

The importance of this training was its contribution to a more dignified future and made me able to feel good helping others.

## **ANNEX II**

Testimony of the Secretary of Municipal Education of São Bento do Una-PE, Profa. Miriam Costa

“Thanks to the success sown in Schools of the Municipal Education Network with a view to continuing the work begun in 2014 with the project “it is GOL”, a project which experienced the **Millennium Development Goals - MDGs**, and by understand that the theme was very well accepted by school and students, encouraged to observe and act towards a better and more just world, the Municipal Secretary of Education of São Bento do Una, in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, experienced this year (2016) the Annual Project “**#MAIS - Morality + Action + Social Integrity**”, experiencing the **Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs**. By understanding, as Paulo Freire (teacher, educator and Brazilian philosopher) proposed, that “to educate is to imbue with meaning what we do at every moment”, we highlight the importance and boldness to work a thematic based on SDGs, with an awareness raising and mobilization project supported by PROEXT UFPB/DRI and UNDP, starting from the global towards the local, in a transition process form MDGs to SDGs, and the amplification of the objectives. That is how we understand that we can actually sow and contribute to a better future.”

### **ANNEX III**

Testimony of multiplier **Maiso Dias Alves Júnior** (Director of Dialogus Consulting, University Professor and Director of Sustainability and Planning ABRH -CE).

“It is very important to be a multiplier of SDGs here in Ceará since it is a region with many inequalities and challenges. The training conducted by the PROEXT/DRI/UFPB students has helped me disseminate the SDGs and to contribute to a more inclusive and egalitarian world, either with local businesses or at the higher education institution I teach. As a member of the Brazilian Association of Human Resources (ABRH -CE), I have also been spreading the SDGs in the associated companies, which are intimately learning the methodology of the SDGs implementation guide and many of which joining the cause. I am very grateful for participating in the SDGs capacitation, learning the methodology and being able to pass on and disseminate knowledge and to contribute to a better world.”